



## ***MICHIGAN CAMPAIGN FOR QUALITY CARE***

**William Mania, Statewide Chairperson**

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**Testimony of Alison Hirschel, Counsel to the Campaign, in support of  
HB 5993 before the House Senior Health, Security and Retirement Committee  
May 9, 2006**

Good Morning Rep. Vander Veen and members of the Committee. I am here today on behalf of the Michigan Campaign for Quality Care, a statewide, nonpartisan grassroots group of consumers who seek better care, better quality of life and better choices for Michigan's long term care consumers.

First, we want to thank and commend you for raising the critically important issue of fire safety in Michigan nursing homes. This issue has been one of our priorities for many years. I want to share three crucial facts that will emphasize why this long neglected issue requires your immediate attention:

- ✧ According to federal data, Michigan ranks *last* in the country in the number of fully sprinklered nursing facilities. Only 36 percent of Michigan nursing homes have sprinklers throughout the building, compared to a national average of more than 80 percent, even though there is widespread agreement that sprinkler systems prevent multiple deaths in fires.
- ✧ According to a U.S. Government Accountability Office report in 2004, 92 percent of all Michigan nursing homes were cited for fire safety violations in their last survey.
- ✧ In 2005, four Michigan nursing home residents died in fires and dozens more were evacuated and hospitalized. In recent years, nursing home fires in other states have claimed dozens of lives.

Thus, while we support this legislation, we understand it is contingent on the passage of federal legislation which will provide funding to facilities to install sprinkler systems. Vulnerable Michigan nursing home residents, most of whom cannot evacuate themselves in case of fire, need protection from fires now. We cannot sit back and wait for the next nursing home tragedy to claim more lives. We therefore suggest that the legislation be amended in the following ways:

1. Amend subsection (3) to require compliance with the legislation if a federal *or* state funding mechanism becomes available to support the costs of installing sprinklers.

2. Require all nursing homes to install immediately hard wired smoke detectors throughout the facility. While fire safety experts tell us residents require *both* smoke detectors and sprinkler systems to assure their safety, installation of hard wired smoke detectors is less cumbersome and should be required immediately.
3. Shorten the time periods in the bill to assure the fastest possible implementation of this legislation once funding becomes available.
4. Until all nursing homes in the state offer both sprinklers and hard wired smoke detectors, require nursing homes to disclose to all residents of and applicants to the facility whether the building has both hard wired smoke detectors and sprinkler systems throughout the facility by providing written information to all applicants and posting information regarding the fire safety status of the facility in the front lobby or other main common area of the facility. Direct the state to make that information available to consumers on the internet.

Our statewide chairperson, Bill Mania, has appeared in front of this committee in the past and talked about his recent experience in three different Michigan nursing homes. Before an accident left him paralyzed, Bill used to work in construction and was extremely aware of the importance of sprinkler systems and smoke detectors in protecting residents. He told me he used to wheel himself around the facilities in which he lived, looking for hard wired smoke detectors and sprinkler systems and wondering, when he saw no evidence of them in the building in which he lived, how he would ever get out in case of fire. We beg you to do everything in your power to protect Michigan's vulnerable residents now from another nursing home tragedy.

Thank you.